Turkish Studies from Different Perspectives

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C H A P T E R TWENTY-THREE

The Problem of Future Generations and Environmental Issues in Turkey

Songül Köse

Abstract

The problem of future generations is a growing ethical issue. There are ongoing discussions about what kind of an earth we are leaving and we should leave to the future generations as a result of the delayed awareness – if not ignorance – of the fact that this World does not belong to us exclusively. When we look upon the example of Turkey, we can see that there is a huge conflict between the environmental utilization and environmental education. On the one hand, we have classes on environment and its health; on the other hand, it is a reality that we have a not-so-eco-friendly government policy, which takes no notice of any kind of environmental issues or requirements. To mention but few, governmental insistence on real estate investments in green spaces, even by covering grade 1 natural site areas, a decline in the extent of agricultural land due to uncontrollable urbanization and hydroelectric power plant projects are among recent events. These are the instances of conflicts between inscriptive and operative environmental policies in Turkey. The purpose of this article is to call attention to this dilemma and to assert that ecocide might be just another kind of genocide for Turkey, i.e., the genocide-yet-to-come.

Keywords: *future generations, environmental issues, environmental health, ecocide.*

Introduction

The relation between mankind and nature is a mutual one and hence our actions, in the first step, affect nature but later on it is again us who are influenced by our own actions. Moreover, these returns from nature sometimes cannot be noticed in the short term but eventually they have an impact on both present and future people. The ethical field of this relationality (between man and earth) is called environmental ethics and Paul Taylor (1986) clarifies it as follows:

Environmental ethics is concerned with the moral relations that hold between humans and the natural world. The ethical principles governing

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those relations determine our duties, obligations, and responsibilities with regard to the Earth's natural environment and all the animals and plants that inhabit it. (Taylor, 1986: 3)

In this article, considering the conflicts between environmental utilization and environmental education in Turkey, the threat of ecocide, extinction, the problem of sustainability and environmental scorecard of Turkey will be given and finally some feasible suggestions will be held.

Anthropocentrism – Extinction – Sustainability

By all means, what we do in this physical world will have a physical effect on our lives. Furthermore, the comebacks from nature may be implicit or explicit, i.e. the result of what human beings have done to nature may or may not manifest itself definitely and this visible return may be either in a short or a long-time period. This fact is ignored for a long, long time and the basic reason for this disregard is the prevalent people-oriented point of view regarding nature, i.e. Western conception of nature. This globally dominant Western viewpoint is called *anthropocentrism*[1] which, in extreme forms, indispensably results in *speciesism*. Speciesism is explained by Peter Singer (1975) as an "attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species." (Singer, 1975: 7).

Throughout the centuries, nature has been used as a tool from a pragmatist viewpoint by the mankind and as a result of this anthropocentric attitude, we now have so many big problems such as growing human population and hence extravagant consumption, uncontrollable structuring, decreasing green space ratio, climate changes, irregular and over-urbanization, uncontrolled and unplanned industrialization, municipal wastes, air-water and soil pollutions, acid rains, global warming, and so on. These problems cause great dangers for nature and for living beings in it. Many species of animals and plants are now under the threat of extinction and herewith we have come face to face with ecosystem degradation.

Handling this problem and proposing possible solutions to it should be seen as playing with the Rubik's Cube, i.e. any interference will cause some unexpected consequences and they will reshape the existent problem. That is, on the one hand we should consider *sustainability* and on the other hand we should accommodate ourselves to a changing environment. Then, what is sustainability? In order to make clear the concept of sustainability within the context of this paper, here is a comprehensive definition of sustainability from

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[1]"Anthropocentrism, or human-centeredness, is basically the view that human beings are at the center of everything, and other things or beings that are external to humans are only for the good of human beings." (Köse, 2014: 21). Environmental ethics takes shape as anthropocentrism or non-anthropocentrism on the loci of value. According to the anthropocentric point of view, things have only instrumental value; to non-anthropocentrism, things – whatever they are – have or may have intrinsic (inherent) value.

an article of Bryan G. Norton named "Sustainability, Human Welfare, and Ecosystem Health":

> Sustainability is defined as an intertemporal relationship between human needs and human productive capacities, as a relationship between human welfare at different stages of human development. While the environment is mentioned, it appears as a passive element in the equation – needs are human-determined, and limitations are seen as human limitations. The environment does not impose any nonnegotiable limits on sustainable use, independent of limitations on the abilities of humans to control it. Any limitation on use of the environment may in principle be overcome by some new breakthrough in technology and social organization. Our obligation, on this view, is to balance present fulfilment of needs against the ability of future generations to fulfil their needs. (Norton, 2002: 169)

Despite the fact that increasingly uncontrollable naturel-social-economic fluctuations on earth call for urgent attention, all our so-called global solutions fail to be sustainable. In this context, the way of changing people's lives into eco-friendly forms and the precautions that can be taken are supposed to be questioned. Ecological points of views have to be formed and humans should be informed about the situation in the world and the future of both the earth and the mankind. Here are some probable and essential attempts:

- *Preservation* and *conservation* of green spaces,
- Recovering and expanding green zones,
- Using eco-friendly energy generating resources,
- Eco-friendly water management policies,
- Preventing air-marine and soil pollutions,
- Avoiding wastage,
- Making *recycling* and *upcycling* obligatory,
- Population planning,
- Raising the awareness of people by giving discourses on the issue,
- Establishing laws and imposing civil penalties on the ones who disobey them,
- The effective use of audio-visual media,
- Assembling semiannual global meetings, regional and international collaboration and so forth.

Last but not least, while endeavoring to fulfil the *duties* given above we have to keep in mind the fact that we all are living in the *same* world.

Future Generations

Speaking of duties, do we have moral obligations toward future generations? I assume,we all give an affirmative reply to this question without

having any opinion or knowledge about future people (the technology they will have, their world-views and personalities, etc.). One of the main reasons for the positive answer to this question is this undeniable fact that we shape our lives taking into account the past decisions that past people made. In the same vein,what we do today is going to, without question, affect the lives of future generations. Hence,we should go through the proper channels considering our posterity albeit they are unknown and unknowable.

No wonder it is not possible to leave the earth to future people in its present state when we reconsider the present situation. Our first and the most important responsibility to future generations must be to leave a healthy nature which can function properly and produce fundamental resources with ease. Therefore, we should ensure biological diversity and integrity, and manage natural resources. Ernest Partridge articulates our responsibility as:"...we owe the future the means to find and develop new sources of energy, and this in turn implies that we should pass on well-funded educational institutions and robust facilities of research and development. Our obligation also entails a policy of recycling and recovering mineral resources and of using renewable resources." (Partridge, 2009: 446).

Conflicts in Turkey and the Threat of Ecocide

According to the newly dated (January, 2016) circular letter issued by the Ministry of Education[1], within the scope of primary-secondary and high school education, there are not any classes on environment per se. However, there are classes which touch, albeit superficially, on the subject like social studies, science and technology, geography and biology. In addition to this, there is an extensive booklet[2] which was prepared with the aid of European Union (EU) in 2006. The only trouble with that is its being only for vocational and technical high schools and not appearing in the core curriculum. Another document under date of 2012 was presented by Ministry of Education and it is simply about raising environmental awareness[3]. A suggestion that can be offered would be to abandon traditional education system and to follow an interdisciplinary method. Despite the unsatisfactory system of education, as stated in a preliminary investigation report by Tüysüzoğlu (2005: 13) there are almost 200 voluntary agencies, institutions and associations. Most of them make a significant contribution to environmental education.

None the less, the way the Turkish government treats nature, many stakeholders argue, is not in accord with ecologically sustainable development which oversees future generations,environmental laws and environmental impact assessment reports. It has been more frequently observed that community is reacting to such government activities and gives voice to their

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[1] Retrieved April 12, 2016, from http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/kitap2016/kitap2016_0.html
[2] Retrieved April 12, 2016, from http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/modulerprogramlar/kursprogramlari/ meslekigelisim/moduller/cevre_koruma.pdf
[3] Retrieved April, 13, 2016, from https://www.cekud.org.tr/index.php/what-we-do/meb-genelgesi/

own demands (remember Gezi, Soma, Artvin etc.). The declared purpose in more than a half of all recent public demonstrations, for instance, denote the issues of environmental health and consequences of so-called "crazy" governmental projects.

As the Energy Architecture Performance Index 2016 of World Economic Forum (WEF) indicates, on environmental sustainability Turkey is on the 64th rank among 126 countries and, on energy access and security it is on the 44th rank[1]. Moreover, according to Yale University Environmental Performance Index (EPI-2016), in the last two years Turkey has been degraded 33 ranks and took place on the 99th rank. What is worse, on Biodiversity and Habitat, Turkey appears on the 177th rank among 180[2]. For Turkey's climate change performance, let us go over the figure below.

Figure 6: Climate change performance in the 2016 EPI for selected top carbon-emitting countries, gauged according to the GDP-standardized Trend in Carbon Intensity and Trend in Carbon Emissions. *Source: 2016 EPI.*
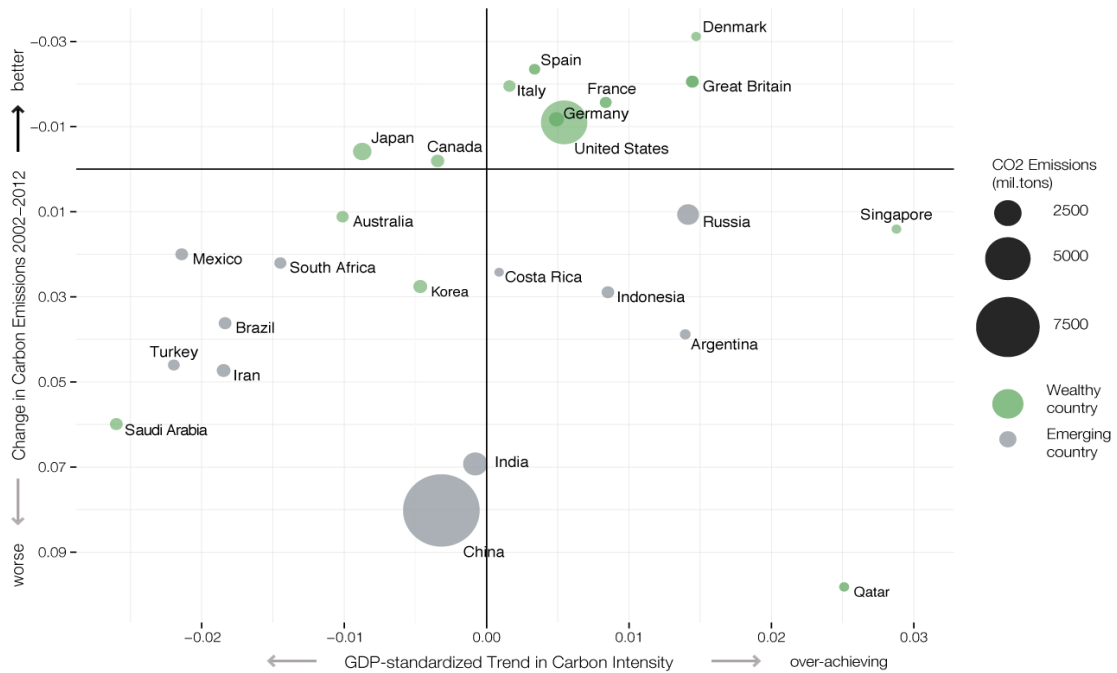
As a matter of fact, it is not a surprise for Turkey to take place at the end of such lists because of insufficient recycling facilities, illegitimate hydroelectric power plant projects, permitting protected areas to be zoned for construction, disregarding biological diversity, etcetera. Instead of enumerating ecological problems in Turkey, demonstrating all the disputes on the plot of Turkey can be easier. The map below[3] is taken from the web page of Political Ecology Working Group which is formed by a group of academicians. In this current study, 178 disputes are certified:

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[1] Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://reports.weforum.org/global-energy-architecture-perfor mance-indexreport-2016/economies/#indexId=EAPI&economy=TUR
[2] Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://epi.yale.edu/country/turkey
[3] Retrieved April 23, 2016, from http://direncevre.org/

[Grey dots: Infrastructure, transportation and urban transformation; Dark grey dots: Wastage management; Dark green dots: Biodiversity; Red dots: Industrial disputes; Black dots: Fossil fuels; Blue dots:Hydroelectric power plants and water management; Orange dots: Mining and building materials industry; Yellow dots: Nuclear; Dark purple dots: Forest, soil, agriculture and livestock breeding; Purple dots: Tourism and entertainment; Green dots: Wind power, solar and geothermal energy.]

Conclusion

In the light of presented documents and mentioned facts, it is not a mystery that Turkey is going to face with ecocide, the genocide-yet-to-come, unless the government develops a new environmental policy. The dilemma that Turkey suffers from is rooted in the discrepancy between inscriptive and operative environmental policies of the current government. Besides putting into practice the attempts given under the subtitle of "Anthropocentrism - Extinction - Sustainability", an interdisciplinary survey may help the problems Turkey suffer from. However each field of study is self-enclosed and hence the work they produce or suggest becomes less effective. Therefore, as a first step, the problem of gathering of different scientific study fields should be eliminated and then, within the scope of a project, a well-disciplined plan should be practiced.

In a country in which the importance of human life is ignored easily, talking about the future generations, their rights and suggesting ecological solutions may sound weird and meaningless. However, calling attention to this huge problem can be the trigger of a change.

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